



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY GENERAL • METROPOLITAN NASHVILLE DAVIDSON COUNTY

# NEWS RELEASE

WASHINGTON SQUARE, SUITE 500 • 222 2ND AVENUE NORTH • NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37201

**VICTOR S. (TORRY) JOHNSON III**

DISTRICT ATTORNEY GENERAL

June 25, 2012

Davidson County District Attorney General Torry Johnson today announced the conclusion of the investigation into Davidson County Clerk John Arriola, with the submission of Arriola's resignation, effective June 29, 2012. Arriola's letter of resignation was submitted Monday morning to Vice Mayor Diane Neighbors' office. Arriola friend and employee Leighton Bush has also resigned, and will leave at the end of this month.

In July 2011, Johnson requested the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation open a formal probe into Arriola's office. An audit by the State Comptroller's office was conducted concurrently. That request came after a series of news stories on WTVF-TV and anonymous tips to the District Attorney's office questioned money Arriola accepted for conducting wedding ceremonies, and other spending practices by the Clerk. The results were turned over to Johnson's office early this year, and were reviewed by several senior prosecutors.

"As an elected official, Mr. Arriola had a lot of discretion on how to run the office," Johnson says. "The result of the TBI investigation and state audit found that while some of his actions and decisions may have indeed been questionable, or in violation of Metro policy, they weren't necessarily criminal in nature."

The issue of the money Arriola collected to perform weddings is a little less clear. In their report, state auditors estimated he had collected approximately \$119,400.00 over a five-year period. "Tennessee law does allow a county clerk to accept a gratuity for performing a wedding ceremony, but the clerk may not charge a fee. Whether the money in question in this case was an illegal 'fee' or a permitted 'gratuity' would likely be determined only after protracted and costly litigation," Johnson continues. "I believe it is in the best interest of the residents of Davidson County to accept Mr. Arriola's resignation and allow the Council to begin the process of selecting a qualified replacement. I am certain the new clerk will have a very clear and lawful policy for any weddings in the future."

With his resignation from office, there will be no prosecution of alleged or purported state criminal law violations as a result of what the audits found.

"Davidson County taxpayers put a lot of trust in their elected officials," Johnson says. "I'd like to thank the TBI and the State Comptroller's office for their very detailed investigation and thorough report regarding the Clerk's office. It's always disappointing when you have a situation that requires an investigation like this, especially when it involves an individual who has been elected by the people."

**MEDIA NOTE:** There will be a media availability with General Johnson Monday afternoon at 2:00 p.m. for asking additional questions. This will take place in the Grand Jury room outside the D.A.'s office, on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the Washington Square Building at 222 Second Avenue North.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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